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SUBJECT: MFA OFFICIAL PREVIEWS FERNANDEZ-TARANCO VISIT

REF: BAGHDAD 2885

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Gary A. Grappo for reason 1
.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: On November 1, MFA Senior Policy Advisor at Iraq's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Farid Yassen, met with Pol Deputy Counselor to discuss the imminent visit of UN Assistant Secretary General for Political Affairs Oscar Fernandez-Taranco to Baghdad. Yassen welcomed the visit and elaborated on its particulars, as well as the GOI objective of extending Taranco's inquiry into external involvement in the August 19 bombings at least until the upcoming Iraqi elections in January. He also shared GOI beliefs about the underlying motivations behind both the August 19 and October 25 bombings, addressing the notion that there could be some level of cooperation between Al Qa'ida in Iraq (AQI), the organization claiming responsibility for the two sets of incidents, and Iraqi Baathists, whose leadership is based in Syria. End summary.

MFA PERCEPTIONS ON THE EVE OF TARANCO'S VISIT

12. (C) On the eve of the visit by UN Assistant Secretary General for Political Affairs Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, MFA Senior Policy Advisor Farid Yaseen provided Deputy Pol Counselor with a preview, elaborating on the details of the arrival and visit. Yaseen stated that Fernandez-Taranco was scheduled to arrive in Baghdad on the night of November 1, and that his visit would include meetings with the Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister, and a range of other GOI officials as he pursued his "good offices" mission to examine the issue of external involvement in support of terrorism in Iraq. Yaseen mentioned that the GOI has established an inter-ministerial committee to receive Fernandez-Taranco and manage his visit. Summarizing GOI hopes for the visit, Yaseen stated that the GOI "wants to get through the elections with this watch dog in place", indicating that the GOI hopes Fernandez-Taranco will extend the duration of the visit and return to Iraq multiple times, at least through the run-up to the elections period in January.

13. (C) Yaseen reiterated that he and other GOI officials welcome the visit and will cooperate closely to make the most of Fernandez-Taranco's appointment. He stated that the GOI hoped that the visit would "keep the spotlight" on the significance of the bombings, and that it would be a "scarecrow in the field" to scare away potential efforts by external forces to interfere in Iraq's affairs. Nonetheless, Yaseen offered that many in the GOI feel Taranco does not possess the attributes they had hoped for in an envoy. He echoed Iraqi PM al-Maliki's sentiments (reftel) that the GOI had hoped for a legal or counterterrorism expert like Peter Fitzgerald or Detlev Mehlis, rather than a political officer, to carry out a "Hariri-like" investigation. He added his personal view that Fernandez-Taranco "is part of the UN bureaucracy", and that he would have preferred an independent party to conduct the visit.

14. (C) Yaseen took issue with views expressed most recently during the October 24 FM Zebari- Ambassador Rice meeting that a senior UN official like Fernandez-Taranco could not actually mount an "investigation" unless it was under the auspices of a Chapter VII resolution. To support his claim, he pointed to the six-month, fact-finding tribunal established to investigate the Bhutto assassination, which he stated was "not under Chapter VII". He concluded by saying that his primary concerns are the lack of clarity on the "terms of reference" for Fernandez-Taranco's visit and "how Q"terms of reference" for Fernandez-Taranco's visit and "how his report of the visit will be perceived".

THE BOMBINGS: SUSTAINED ATTACK ON GOI DURING DRAWDOWN

15. (C) Regarding the importance of Fernandez-Taranco's mission, Yassen pointed back to the August 19 bombings, which targeted Iraq's Ministries of Finance and Foreign Affairs, and the October 25 bombing that decimated the Ministry of Justice and the Baghdad Provincial Council building. He observed that these institutions "represented the sovereignty" of Iraq, and he suggested that they were targeted in order to "cripple (the GOI's) ability to function as a sovereign state". When Pol Deputy Counselor asked Yaseen for his thoughts regarding AQI involvement in the attacks, he responded by stating that while "a direct link between AQI and Baathist activity in Syria" is missing, the operation could not have happened without significant logistical support that "only the Baathists could provide" due to their connections to military and security networks. "My suspicion is that Baathists provided funding and

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assistance, and AQI carried out the attacks," he postulated.

16. (C) Yaseen also shared his belief that Iraqi Baathists are "waiting for the Americans to leave", hinting that these Baathist elements, both in Iraq and in Syria, perceive increasing vulnerabilities and weaknesses in the Iraqi state as U.S. forces prepare their drawdown. He predicted that after 2011, Baathists will intensify their attacks, as they strive to destabilize the GOI completely. Pol Deputy Counselor solicited Yaseen's perspectives on possible Syrian motivations for supporting such elements. Yaseen responded by stating his view that Syria wants to see a Baathist regime in Iraq because of "its discomfort with democracy". Pointing out that Syria is a minority regime, he added that the Syrians "want to see a like-minded", anti-democratic regime in Baghdad.

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